

promoting quality public transport.....

CONFERENCE REPORT

Thursday 25th September 2025, The Storey Lancaster
Conference kindly supported by Stagecoach

1. Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman, David Butterworth, welcomed delegates to the Conference and thanked all the supporters. He also welcomed the speakers.

David remembered Lancaster very well, as between the ages of 4 and 18 he lived fairly close to Bare Lane station. He described his early interest in railways – the groundwork to his ongoing attraction to trains, buses and trams as the years went on.

In his late teens he worked as a bus conductor in the summer holidays. Later he became a part-time coach driver, driving holiday makers bound for Torquay or Great Yarmouth.

As he had said earlier there must have been ‘something in the blood’ and that, he suspected was the case with many of the audience. In particular, those who spent their free time helping to make a railway station look nice, or encouraging the managers of Avanti Trains to run their Pendolinos on time.

A recent example of persuasion has resulted in the powers that be reconsidering bussing people between Preston and Carlisle and instead running diversionary trains via Clitheroe and the Settle-Carlisle Line. In the last few days the good news announcement was that Avanti Trains would be running Evero stock over those scenic lines. A passenger friendly idea to say the least.

David ended by exhorting the audience to keep up the good work and also encouraging some younger people to follow the example.

Lancaster Bus User Group **Councillor Abi Mills**

Abi outlined the group’s activities over the years 2016 to 2024 (its 10th anniversary). Highlights included –

- Successfully campaign for continued support of bus services
- Improved access for wheelchair users at Lancaster bus station

- Bus stop and shelter improvements
- Better Sunday services;

In future the group would -

- Keep listening to members concerns, addressing these with relevant bodies
- Keep fighting to improve the bus station and bus stops
- Keep liaising with the County Council and Bus Companies to get the best possible bus services for the district

Copy of the presentation available on the TravelWatch NorthWest Website - www.travelwatch-northwest.org.uk

3. Stagecoach North Lancs and Cumbria ***David Rich, Commercial Director***

David spoke of the challenges of operating bus services. Reversing the downward trend in bus use would require –

- Better value for money
- Speeding up journeys
- Identifying social good
- Decarbonisation
- Increasing sustainability and accessibility

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Q&A

Roma Patten – need to improve lighting and Stagecoach corporate colour to help the disabled.

Ian Watson- information on Stagecoach App not reliable. A: Accepted improvements needed. More equipment to be provided on vehicles.

Ian Conway – No real time information at Kendal bus station. A: Investment promised.

Don Jary – Lack of consultation on road works by Highways Authorities. A: Agreed an issue, with resultant cost loaded onto user rather than perpetrator.

4. LASRUG ***Cllr Gerry Blaikie, Lancaster City Council***

Gerry recounted a number of initiatives that the group had instigated.

- Local children's artwork at Heysham
- Pictures of local birds to be put up at stations
- Dementia Group from Yorkshire to Morecambe
- Bentham Line 175 anniversary
- Making children aware of the railway/ keep off the line publications.
- Coffee mornings in Bentham.

- Pioneer electrification – Lancaster Castle – Green Ayre - Morecambe

5. Network Rail – West Coast North Modernisation

Pip Hoskins, Principal Programme Sponsor and Ben Fitzpatrick, Senior Public Affairs Manager, North West Route

Pip outlined the modernisation plans. Over the next 3 years the focus would be on replacing outdated 1970s infrastructure with modern, high-performance systems laying the groundwork for future HS2 services, digital signalling and a more resilient and on time railway.

2029 onwards would see a conversion to digital signalling.

Throughout the process stakeholders would be kept involved –

- Industry Stakeholder Integration
- Strengthened Customer Communication

Ben detailed the arrangements for the major M6 bridge replacement at Clifton 1st – 14th January 2026. As part of the replacement services for passengers a train service shuttling between Wigan or Preston via Blackburn and the Settle to Carlisle line would be provided.,

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6. Eden Project Morecambe Transport Issues

Kevin Riley, WSP Consultation

Kevin described the existing transport infrastructure in the Lancaster and Morecambe area. The aim was to work with the existing transport infrastructure where possible.

Bus opportunities –

- Possible Park and Ride operation from M6 Junction 34, using spare capacity.
- Work with operators to enhance / re-time public services to better match Eden visitor and staff peak times including weekend and evening events.
- Improved bus stop facilities for both public buses and Park and Ride buses along Marine Rd Central.
- Facilities for private coaches including stops on Marine Rd Central, and layover facilities elsewhere in town.
- Enhance walk route from bus station to Eden.

Rail –

- Work with operators to enhance waiting facilities e.g. physical improvements, longer opening times more aligned with Eden visitor times.

- Examine potential for additional carriages on existing services at Eden peak times.
- Examine potential for additional services in the longer-term, noting capacity constraints on WCML at Lancaster.
- Work with operators to enhance / re-time services to better match Eden visitor and staff peak times including weekend and evening events.
- Enhance walk route from rail station to Eden.

Q&A

Nina Smith – can digital signalling be introduced elsewhere at the same time? A: Yes. New stations- Garstang, Lancaster University? A: Focus on renewals & performance benefits. Funding priorities.

Don Jary – 1st Jan start too early for Clifton Bridge. Still school hols.

John Moorhouse – opportunity for capacity enhancements? A: Would require further funding.

John Owen – need for better rail service for Eden. E.g. Manchester to Morecambe to give a more frequent service on the Morecambe line. Also Park & Ride. A: Looking at latter. Will be a steady flow of passengers not big peaks.

7. Date of Next Conference

Date in March 2026 tba. Manchester.